



US009045105B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Khaitan

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,045,105 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Jun. 2, 2015**

(54) **SEATBELT BUCKLE POSITION HOLDERS**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 588 days.

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(21) Appl. No.: **13/373,544**

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(22) Filed: **Nov. 18, 2011**

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(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**

B60R 22/00 (2006.01)

B60R 22/48 (2006.01)

B60R 22/18 (2006.01)

B60R 22/26 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **B60R 22/18** (2013.01); **B60R 22/26** (2013.01); **B60R 2022/1806** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC B60R 22/26

USPC 248/220.21, 220.22, 221.11, 222.11, 248/222.12, 225.21; 280/801.1, 808; 296/65.03; 297/482

See application file for complete search history.

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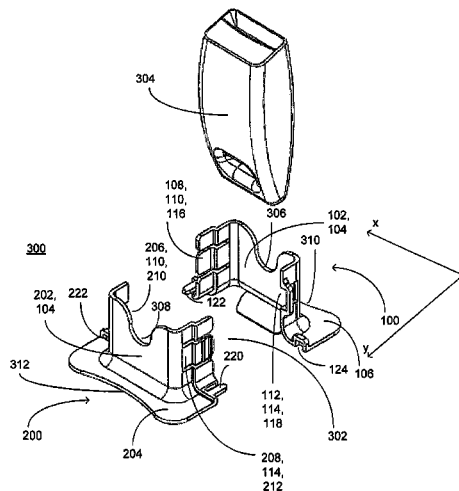
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(57)

ABSTRACT

A seatbelt buckle position holder includes first and second parts each of which has a part of a collar, which is formed when the parts are connected and is configured to support a seatbelt buckle in a position other than against an automobile seat bottom. First and second parts can be identical. Each of the parts can also include a base, which can have a substantially planar shape and can be configured to be placed in a gap formed where an automobile seat bottom encounters an automobile seat back to limit movement of the seatbelt buckle position holder. First and second parts can be adjustably connected to allow various degrees of separation between parts of the collar to accommodate different sizes of seatbelt buckles. A divider can be connected between first and second parts so that the seatbelt buckle holder can be configured to support two seatbelt buckles.

23 Claims, 11 Drawing Sheets



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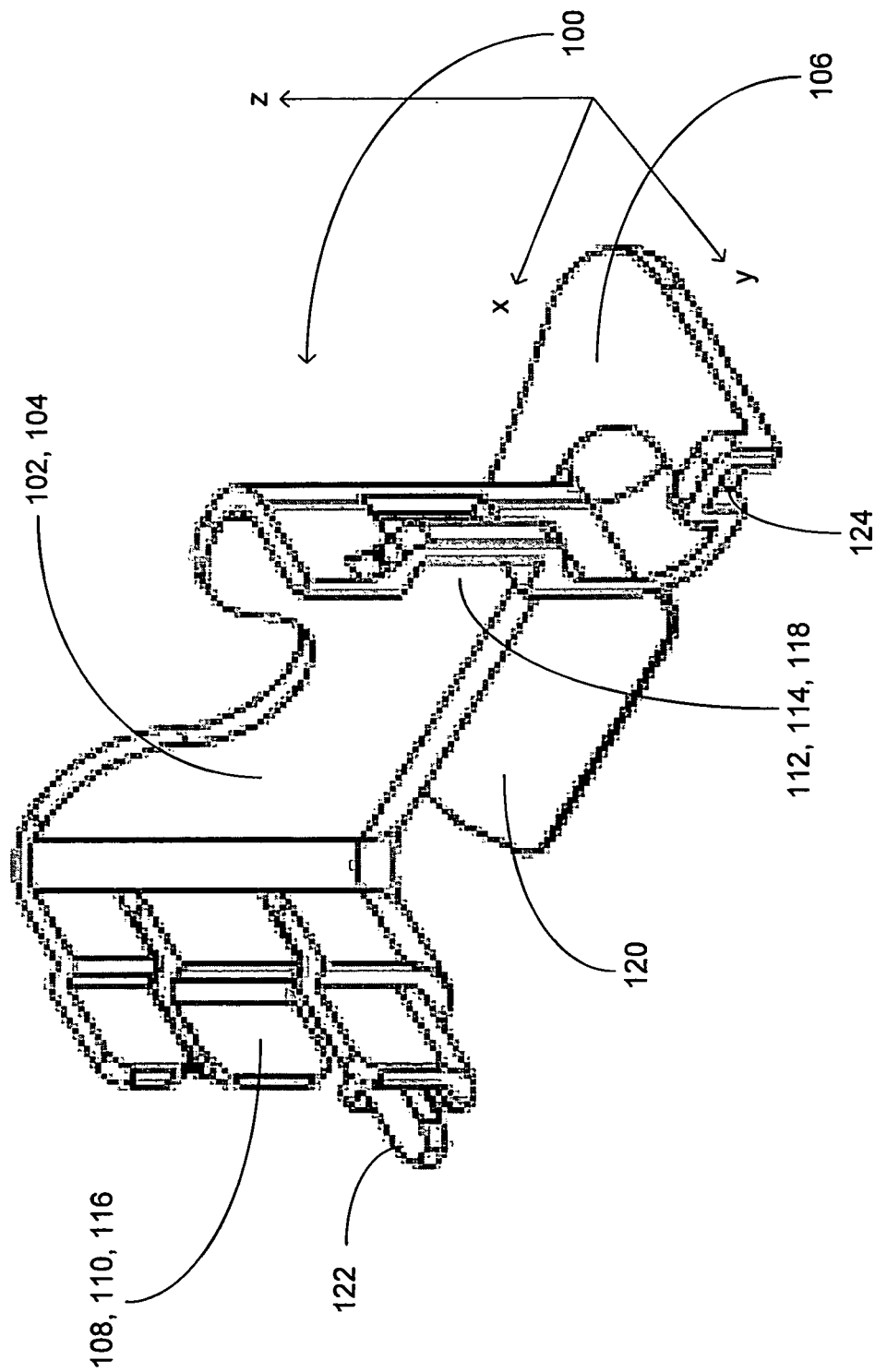
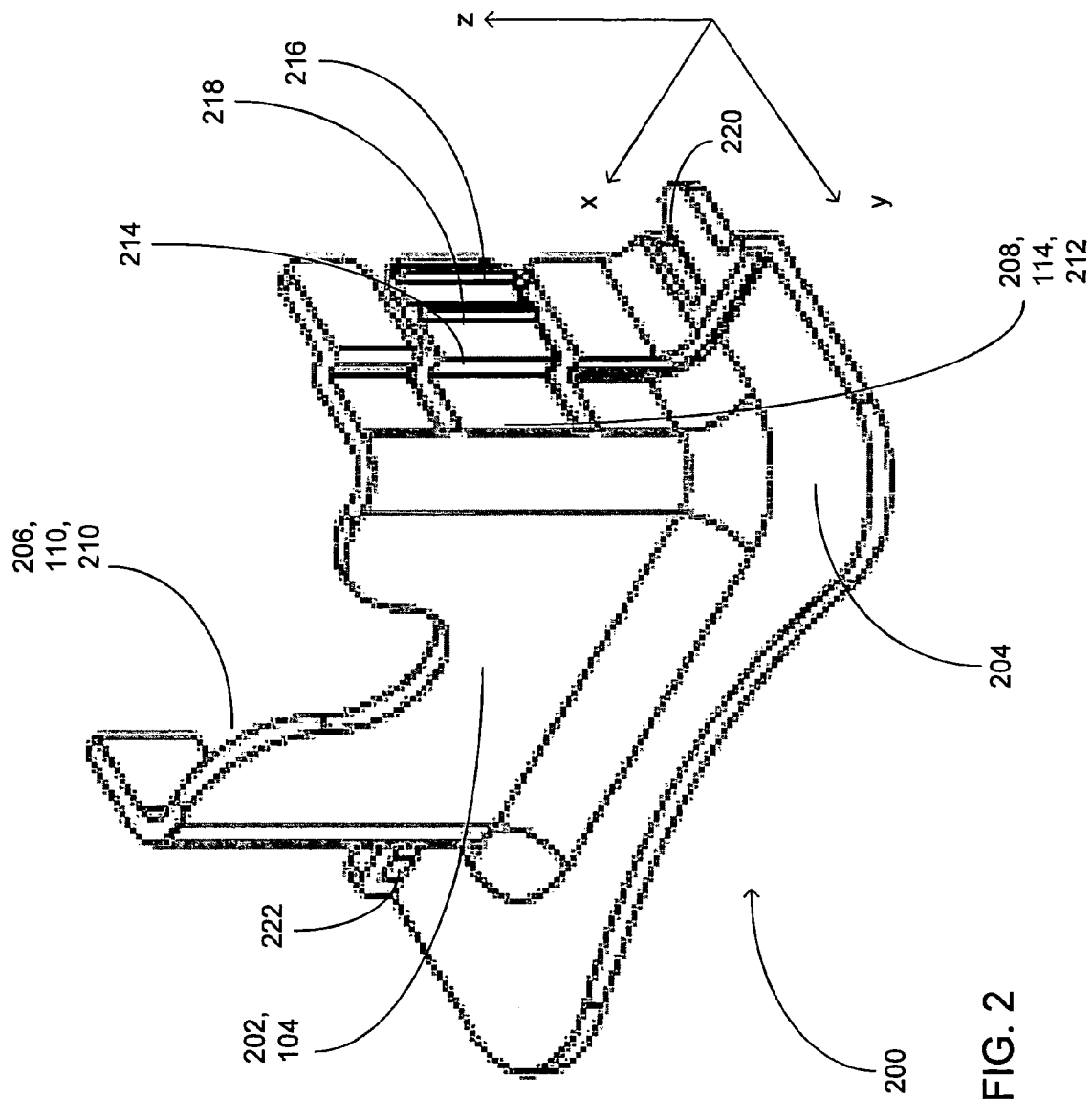


FIG. 1



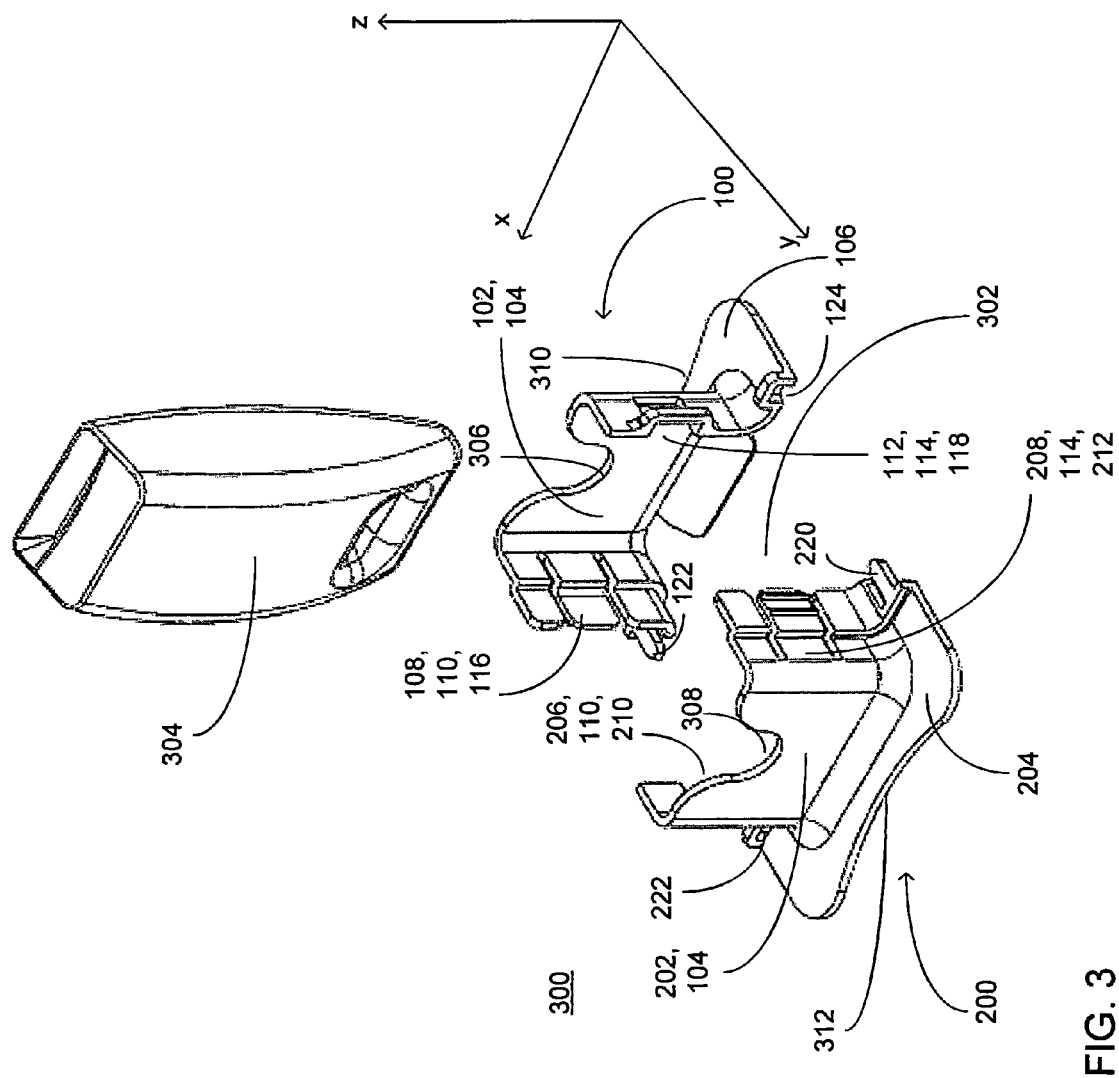


FIG. 3

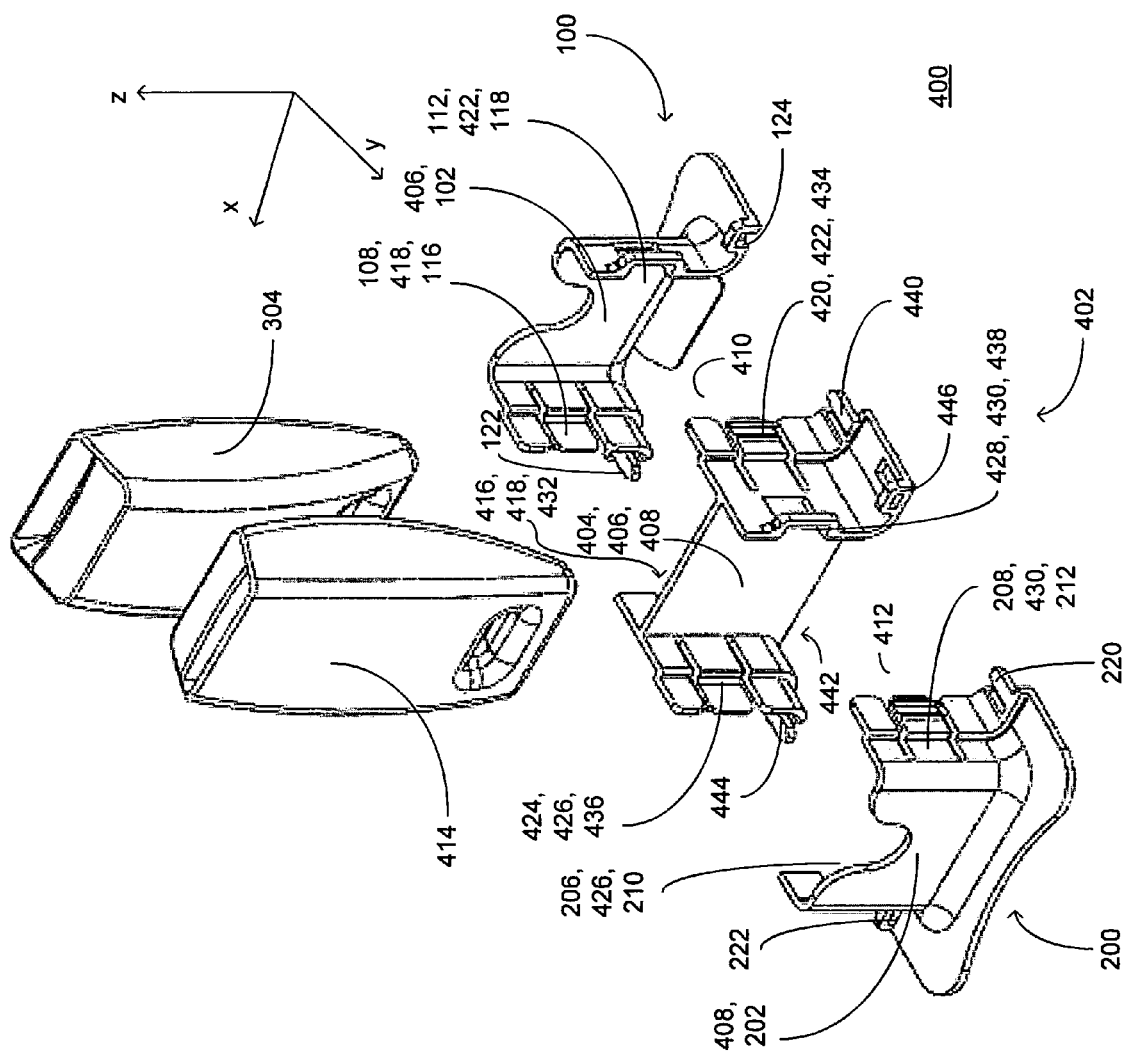
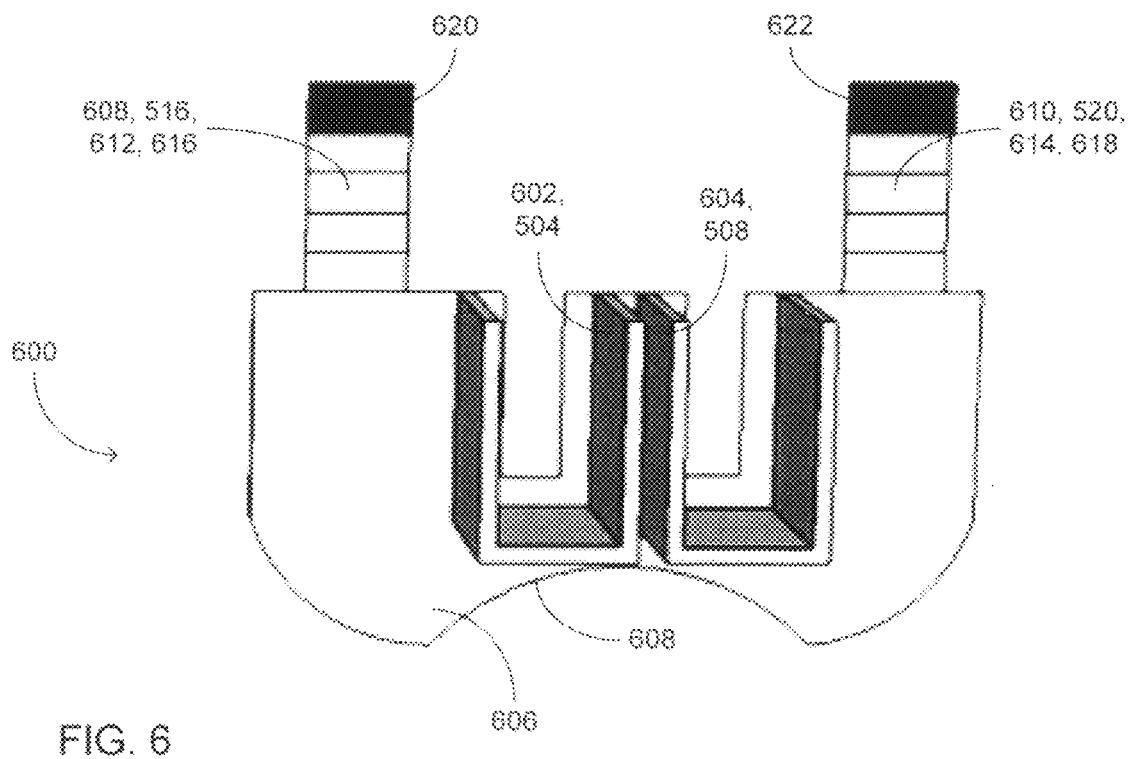
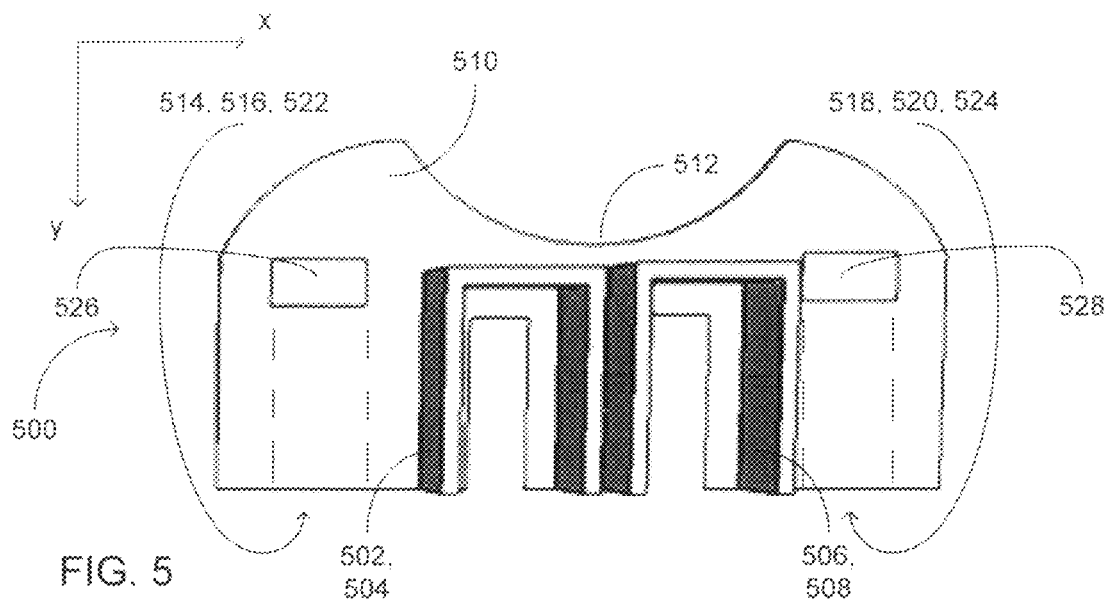


FIG. 4



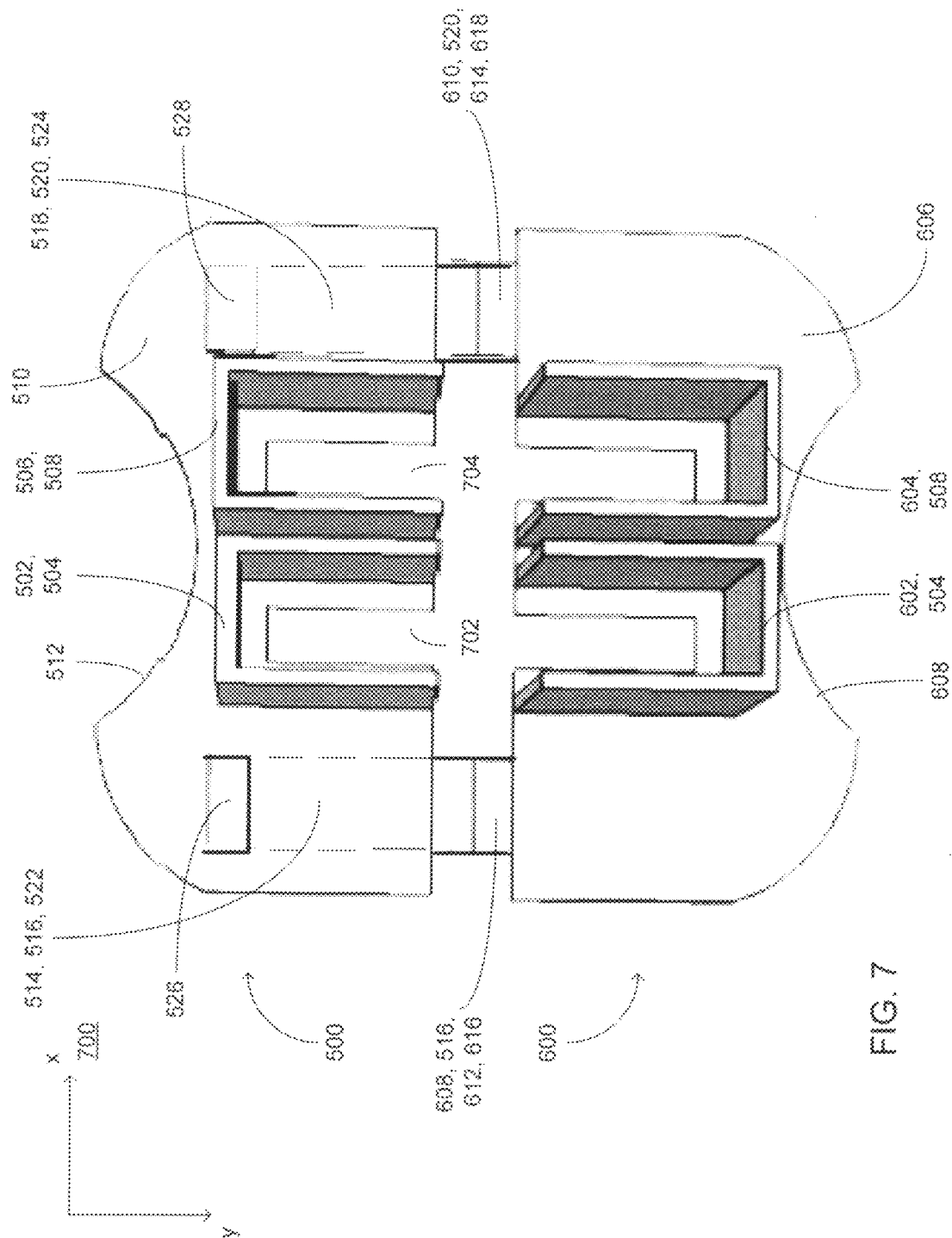


FIG. 7

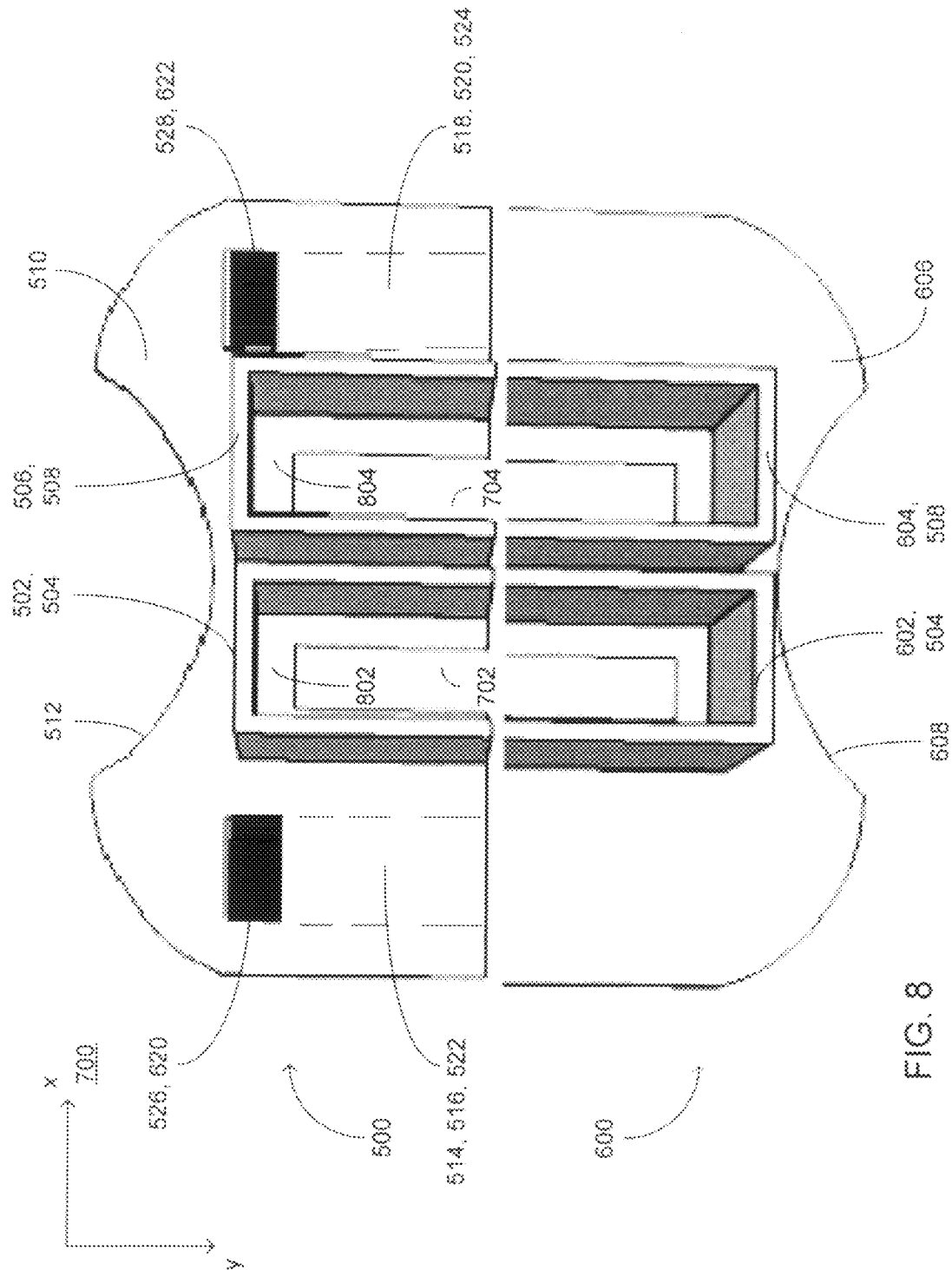


FIG. 8

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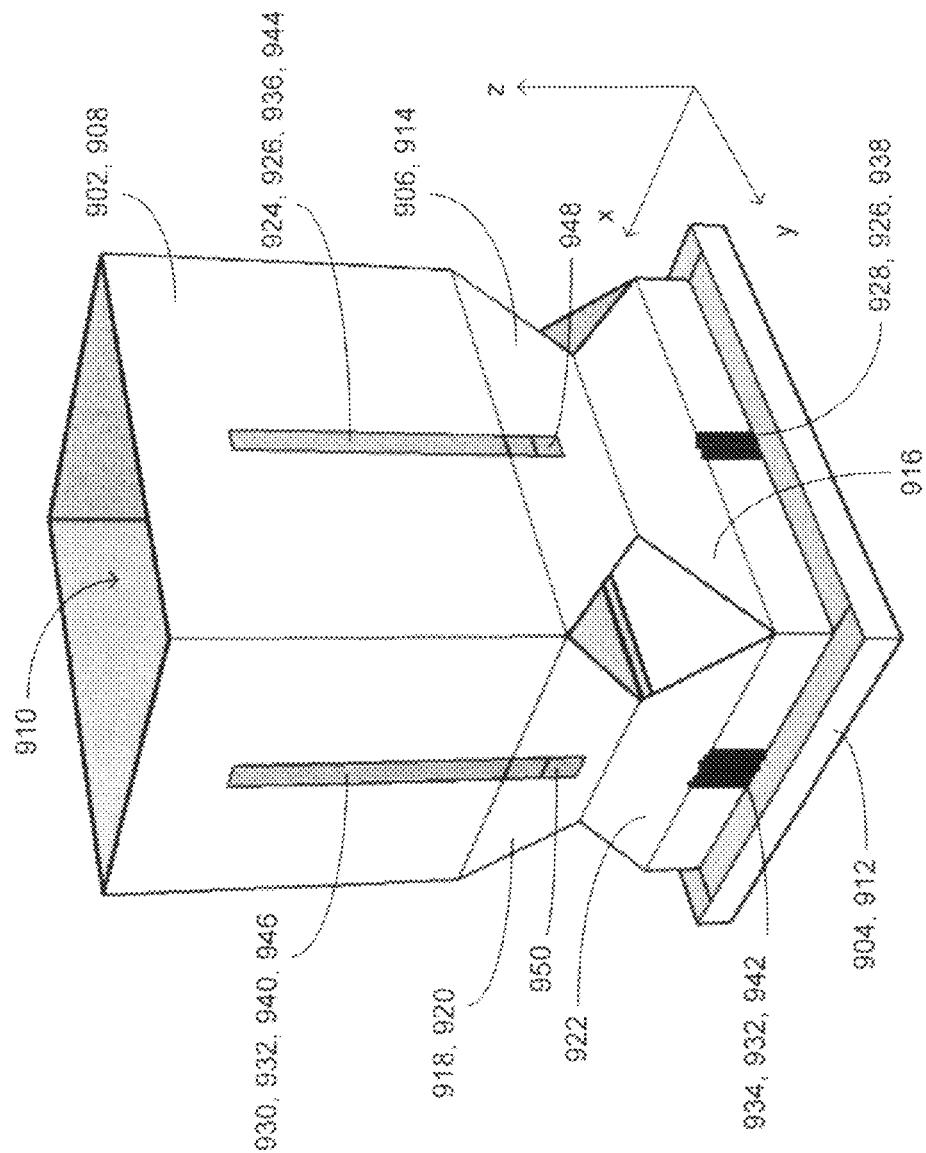


FIG. 9

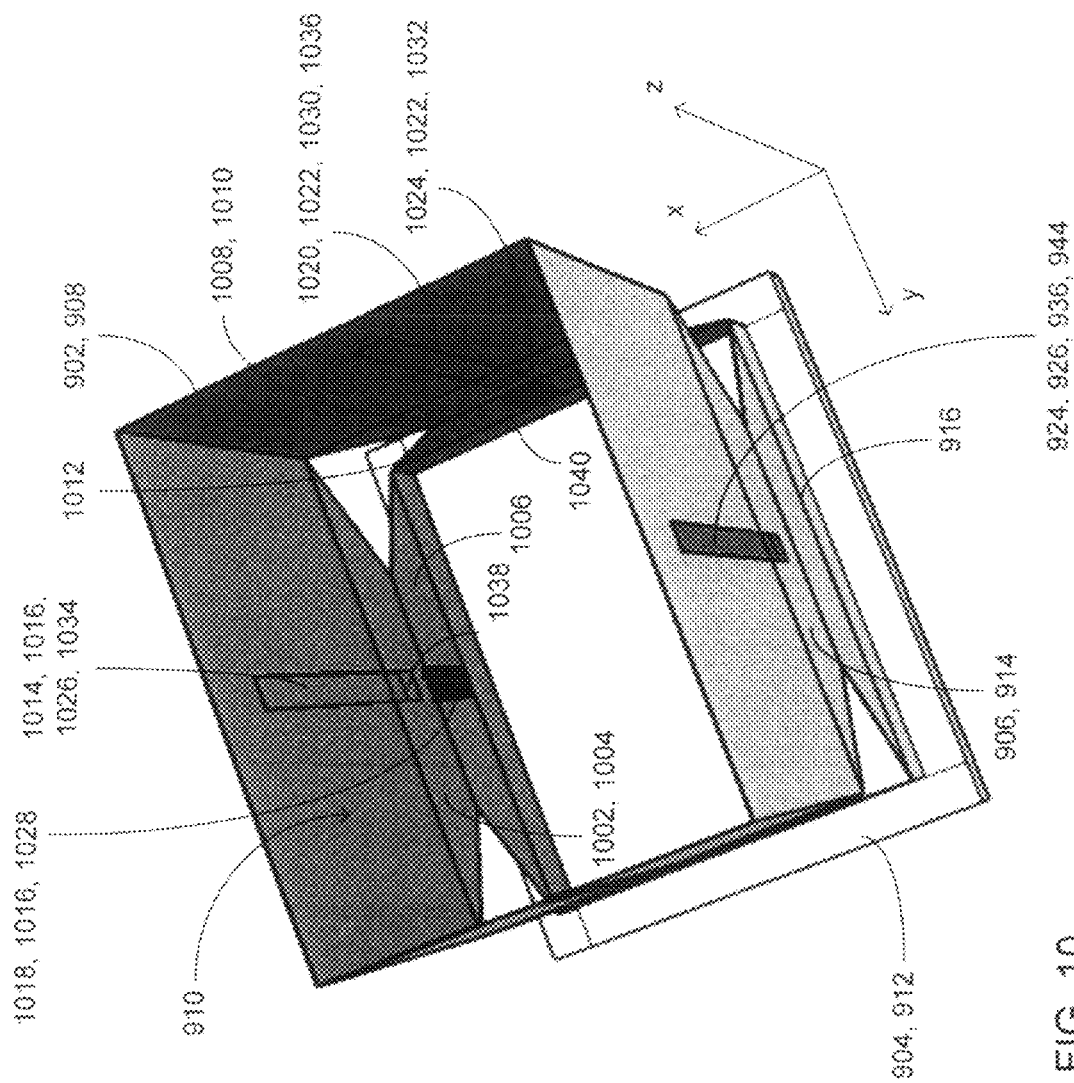
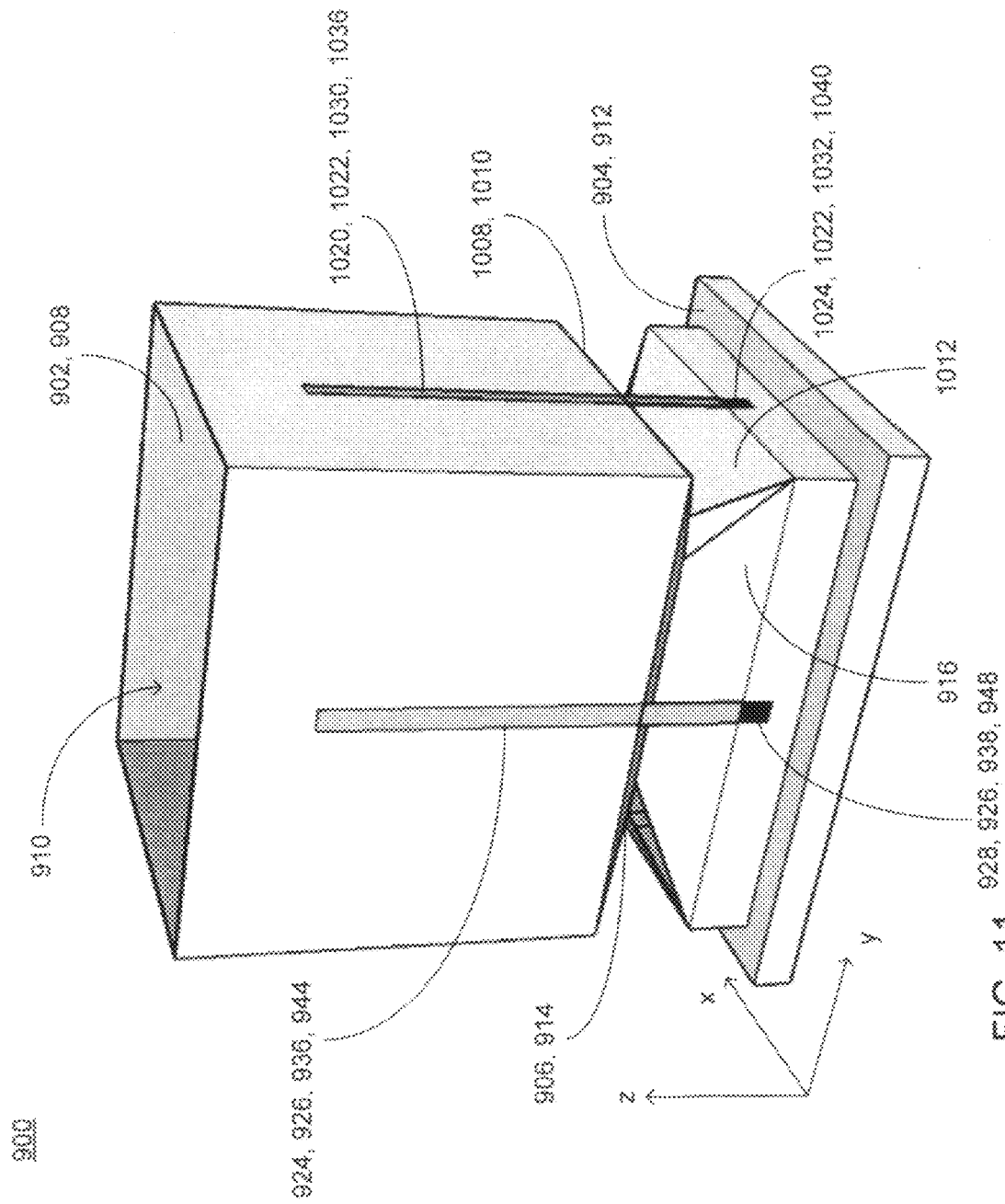


FIG. 10



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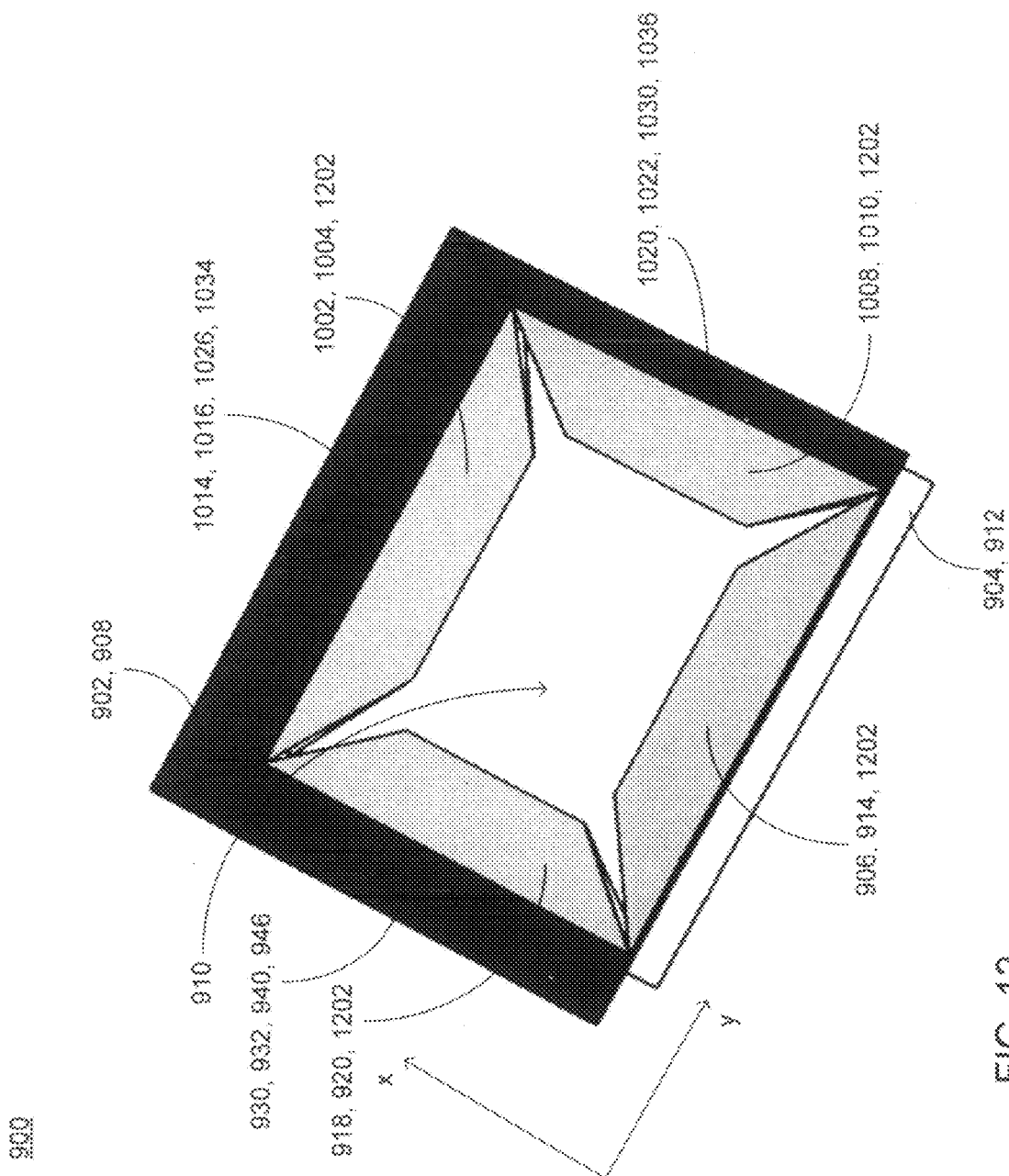


FIG. 12

SEATBELT BUCKLE POSITION HOLDERS

BACKGROUND

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, automobile manufacturers began introducing seatbelts as an option. Generally, a seatbelt includes at least two parts. Each part includes a length of webbing with at least one end firmly attached to an automobile. For one part, a buckle is attached to the other end of the webbing. For the other part, a tongue is attached to the webbing. The buckle includes a groove into which the tongue may be inserted. Internal to the buckle is a male part of a fastener configured to connect to a female part of the fastener on the tongue when the tongue is inserted into the groove. The buckle also includes a release button so that the tongue can be removed from the groove.

Since being introduced, seatbelts have proven to be a highly effective means for avoiding injuries in collisions. The National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that approximately 13,000 lives in the United States are saved each year from wearing seatbelts. Sadly, the NHTSA also estimates that approximately 7,000 collision fatalities each year could have been avoided if the victims had been wearing seatbelts.

Although seatbelts, when worn by adults, have proven to be a highly effective means for avoiding injuries in collisions, such seatbelts, sized to be worn by adults, have been found to cause injuries to small children when worn by them. In response to this problem child safety seats were developed. Generally, a child safety seat includes a rigid frame with a padded insert and straps that buckle a child to the frame. Additionally, a child safety seat typically includes means for connecting it to a seatbelt so that the frame is connected to the automobile. In this manner, a child properly buckled into a child safety seat, which itself is properly buckled to a seatbelt, is protected from some injuries in collisions. Since the mid 1980s most states have enacted laws requiring the mandatory wearing of seatbelts and the mandatory use of child safety seats.

Almost since their introduction, one of the problems that has limited the use of seatbelts has been the tendency of the buckle to slide into places where it is not readily visible. For example, often a gap is formed where an automobile seat bottom encounters an automobile seat back and the buckle has had a tendency to slide into the gap. A gap can also exist between two seats. Automobile manufacturers have addressed this issue by shortening the length of the webbing to which the buckle is attached so that it cannot slide into the gap.

Unfortunately, if the use of a short length of webbing has mitigated the problem of locating a buckle in a situation in which the seatbelt will be used by an adult, then it has exacerbated the problem of locating and interacting with the buckle in a situation in which the seatbelt will be used in conjunction with a child safety seat. The bulkiness of a child safety seat can cause it to block the view and reasonable accessibility of the buckle for an adult when the child safety seat is positioned between the adult and the buckle. The bulkiness of a child safety seat can also cause the buckle to be beyond the reach of an arm of a child sitting in the child safety seat. The net result is that the trouble in seeing or reaching the buckle makes the task of buckling a child into a child safety seat an unnecessarily difficult feat. This is particularly the case when more than one child safety seat is used, more than one passenger occupies the automobile seat, or both.

Additionally, many automobiles intended for family use are designed so that at least the seat backs of the rear seats can

be folded over so that the rear portion of the automobile can be converted from carrying passengers to carrying goods. To facilitate the folding of these seat backs, many manufacturers have introduced pockets into the seat bottoms. The pockets are configured to hold the seatbelt buckles when the seat backs are folded over. The presence of these pockets can further exacerbate the problem of locating a buckle in a situation in which the seatbelt will be used in conjunction with a child safety seat.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS/FIGURES

FIGS. 1 through 4 illustrate three dimensional views of seatbelt buckle position holders, according to embodiments.

FIGS. 5 through 8 illustrate top views of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to embodiments.

FIGS. 9 through 11 illustrate three dimensional views of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to embodiments.

FIG. 12 illustrates a top view of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment.

In the drawings, the leftmost digit(s) of a reference number identifies the drawing in which the reference number first appears.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Embodiments of seatbelt buckle position holders are now described with reference to the figures, where like reference numbers indicate identical or functionally similar elements. While specific configurations and arrangements are discussed, it should be understood that this is done for illustrative purposes only. A person skilled in the relevant art will recognize that other configurations and arrangements can be used without departing from the spirit and scope of the description.

Although the inspiration for the embodiments of the seatbelt buckle position holders described herein was their intended use in situations in which seatbelts will be used in conjunction with child safety seats, a person skilled in the relevant art will recognize other situations in which the embodiments of the seatbelt buckle position holders described herein can prove beneficial. By way of example only, and not limitation, the embodiments of the seatbelt buckle position holders described herein can be used by: (1) children who have outgrown child safety seats, but may be required to use a booster seat; (2) children who are not required to use a child safety seat or a booster seat, but struggle to buckle a seatbelt without assistance; (3) overweight, disabled, or elderly passengers who lack some mobility of an arm that gives rise to a struggle to buckle a seatbelt; (4) disabled or elderly passengers who have trouble with their vision that give rise to a struggle to buckle a seatbelt; or (5) any passenger or driver sitting in an automobile, seat with a seatbelt buckle configured to interact with one of the embodiments of the seatbelt buckle position holders described herein.

The embodiments of the seatbelt buckle position holders described herein are intended to be an aid for the buckling of a seatbelt. They do not eliminate the responsibility of an adult to buckle properly a child into a child safety seat.

FIGS. 1 through 4 illustrate three dimensional views of seatbelt buckle position holders, according to embodiments.

FIG. 1 illustrates a three dimensional view of a first part of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment. In FIG. 1, a first part 100 includes a first part 102 of a collar 104.

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FIG. 2 illustrates a three dimensional view of a second part of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment. In FIG. 2, a second part 200 includes a second part 202 of collar 104.

FIG. 3 illustrates a three dimensional view of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment. In FIG. 3, a seatbelt buckle position holder 300 includes first part 100 and second part 200. First part 100 is configured to be connected to second part 200 to form seatbelt buckle position holder 300, which includes collar 104.

First part 100 can be identical to second part 200. Advantageously, having first part 100 identical to second part 200 can reduce the number of tools needed to manufacture seatbelt buckle position holder 300. Advantageously, reducing the number of tools needed to manufacture seatbelt buckle position holder 300 can reduce the cost of manufacturing seatbelt buckle position holder 300. Advantageously, because first part 100 can be identical to second part 200, a user with a broken one of first part 100 or second part 200 can acquire a replacement part without needing to distinguish between first and second parts 100 and 200.

In seatbelt buckle position holder 300, first and second parts 102 and 202 can be shaped to form an aperture 302 surrounded by collar 104. Aperture 302 can be sized to allow a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through. Collar 104 can be configured to support a seatbelt buckle 304. In FIG. 3, for example, seatbelt buckle 304 can have a length (shown substantially parallel to the z-axis), a width (shown substantially parallel to the x-axis), and a thickness (shown substantially parallel to the y-axis). For example, if an automobile seat bottom (not shown) lies substantially parallel to the x-y plane, then collar 104 can be configured to support seatbelt buckle 304 in a position other than against the automobile seat bottom. In FIG. 3, for example, collar 104 can be configured to support seatbelt buckle 304 in a position substantially perpendicular to an automobile seat bottom. Collar 104 can also be configured to support seatbelt buckle 304 in other positions with respect to an automobile seat bottom.

At least one of first and second parts 102 and 202 can be shaped to allow access to a release button (not shown) on seatbelt buckle 304. Sometimes, for example, seatbelt buckle 304 can have a release button on a face that is substantially parallel to the x-z plane. For example, in FIG. 3, first part 102 has a cutaway portion 306 and second part 202 has a cutaway portion 308. At least one of cutaway portions 306 and 308 can allow a user to have access to a release button on seatbelt buckle 304 when seatbelt buckle 304 is being supported by seatbelt buckle position holder 300.

At least one of first and second parts 100 and 200 can further comprise a base. In FIG. 1, for example, a base 106 can be connected to first part 102. Base 106 can have a substantially planar shape. Likewise, in FIG. 2, for example, a base 204 can be connected to second part 202. Base 204 can have a substantially planar shape. Advantageously, at least one of bases 106 and 204 can be positioned to cover one or more pockets (not shown) formed in an automobile seat bottom (not shown). This can prevent seatbelt buckle 304, another seatbelt buckle (not shown), or both from occupying the one or more pockets.

At least one of bases 106 and 204 can be configured to be placed in a gap formed where an automobile seat bottom encounters an automobile seat back (not shown). For example, if an automobile seat bottom lies substantially parallel to the x-y plane and an automobile seat back lies substantially parallel to the x-z plane, then a gap may exist along a line substantially parallel to the x-axis. Base 106, base 204, or both can be placed in the gap.

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At least one of bases 106 and 204 can be shaped to avoid an obstruction present in at least one of an automobile seat bottom, an automobile seat back, and the gap. Sometimes, for example, the seatbelt presents such an obstruction. For example, in FIG. 3, base 106 has a cutaway portion 310 and base 204 has a cutaway portion 312. Having each of cutaway portions 310 and 312 positioned near the middle of bases 106 and 204 produces salient portions near the edges of bases 106 and 204. At least one of cutaway portions 310 and 312 can allow seatbelt buckle position holder 300 to be positioned near the obstruction and still can allow salient portions of at least one of bases 106 and 204 to be placed in the gap. Advantageously, because seatbelt buckle position holder 300 comprises first and second parts 100 and 200, base 106 of first part 100, for example, can be placed in the gap near the obstruction so that seatbelt buckle 304 can be positioned between first and second parts 100 and 200 before first and second parts 100 and 200 are connected.

Advantageously, placing at least one of bases 106 and 204 in the gap can limit the ability of seatbelt buckle position holder 300 to rotate about a line substantially parallel to the y-axis. This can contribute to the ability of seatbelt buckle position holder 300 to immobilize seat belt buckle 304. In the absence of the ability to place at least one of bases 106 and 204 in the gap, collar 104 might have to be sufficiently thick enough to limit the ability of seatbelt buckle position holder 300 to rotate about a line substantially parallel to the y-axis. Therefore, advantageously, the ability to place at least one of bases 106 and 204 in the gap can reduce the thickness of collar 104, which can limit the size of seatbelt buckle position holder 300. Advantageously, limiting the size of seatbelt buckle position holder 300 can prevent seatbelt buckle position holder 300 from interfering with other items on the automobile seat bottom, including, by way of example only, and not limitation, other passengers, child safety seats, or both. Advantageously, limiting the size of seatbelt buckle position holder 300 can reduce the amount of material consumed to make seatbelt buckle position holder 300, which can reduce the cost of manufacturing seatbelt buckle position holder 300.

First and second parts 100 and 200 can further comprise at least one first part of at least one fastener and at least one second part of the at least one fastener. The first part of the at least one fastener can be connected to at least one of first part 102 and base 106. The second part of the at least one fastener can be connected to at least one of second part 202 and base 204. In FIG. 1, for example, a first part 108 of a first fastener 110 and a first part 112 of a second fastener 114 can be connected to first part 102. Likewise, in FIG. 2, for example, a second part 206 of first fastener 110 and a second part 208 of second fastener 114 can be connected to second part 202.

At least one of first and second fasteners 110 and 114 can be any means that connect first and second parts 100 and 200 including, by way of example only, and not limitation, adhesive means, a band, a strap, a staple, a screw, a pin, a nail, a peg, a grommet, a clip, a rivet, a clutch, a snap fastener, a buckle, a button, a frog, a lace, a tie, a zipper, a hinge, a clamshell, a retainer ring, a hook-and-eye closure, a hook-and-loop fastener (e.g., Velcro®), and the like. Advantageously, having both first and second fasteners 110 and 114 can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder 300.

For example, first part 108 can be a male part 116, first part 112 can be a female part 118, second part 206 can be a female part 210, and second part 208 can be a male part 212. Male part 116 can be configured to connect to female part 210 and male part 212 can be configured to connect to female part 118.

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(In another embodiment, both first parts **108** and **112** can be male parts and both second parts **206** and **208** can be female parts, or vice versa.)

Male part **212** can have a portion **214** substantially elongated along an axis. In FIG. 2, for example, portion **214** is substantially elongated along a line substantially parallel to the y-axis. Portion **214** can have a first protrusion **216** substantially perpendicular to the axis. In FIG. 2, for example, first protrusion **216** protrudes from portion **214** substantially along a line substantially parallel to the x-axis, which is perpendicular to the y-axis. First protrusion **216** can have an original shape and can be made of an elastic material that is configured to compress when first protrusion **216** is passed through female part **118** and to expand to the original shape after first protrusion **216** has passed through female part **118**.

If the original shape of first protrusion **216** has a cross sectional area in a plane substantially parallel to the x-z plane that is larger than a cross sectional area in a plane substantially parallel to the x-z plane of female part **118**, then having first protrusion **216** expand to the original shape after first protrusion **216** has passed through female part **118** can connect male part **212** to female part **118** and, in turn, first part **100** to second part **200** to form seatbelt buckle position holder **300**. Male part **116** can be configured in a similar manner as male part **212** so that male part **116** can be made to connect to female part **210**.

Male part **212** can be releasable from female part **118**. For example, having first protrusion **216** compress when first protrusion **216** is passed through female part **118** in the reverse direction can allow male part **212** to be separated from female part **118**. Likewise, male part **116** can be releasable from female part **210**. In this manner, first part **100** can be separated from second part **200**. Advantageously, the ability to separate first part **100** from second part **200** can allow for first and second parts **100** and **200** to be used in a variety of configurations.

First part **108** can be adjustably connected to second part **206** to allow various degrees of separation between first and second parts **102** and **202** when first part **100** is connected to second part **200**. Likewise, second part **208** can be adjustably connected to first part **112** to allow various degrees of separation between first and second parts **102** and **202** when first part **100** is connected to second part **200**. Portion **214** can have more than one protrusion. In FIG. 2, for example, in addition to first protrusion **216**, portion **214** can have a second protrusion **218**. Second protrusion **218** can be configured in a manner similar to first protrusion **216**. Advantageously, having more than one protrusion can allow male part **212** to be adjustably connected to female part **118** to allow various degrees of separation between first and second parts **102** and **202** when first part **100** is connected to second part **200**. In this manner seatbelt buckle position holder **300** can be adjusted to accommodate different sizes of seatbelt buckle **304**, particularly different thicknesses of seatbelt buckle **304**.

At least one of first and second parts **100** and **200** can further comprise a flap. In FIG. 1, for example, a flap **120** can be connected to at least one of first part **102** and base **106**. Flap **120** can be configured to help support seatbelt buckle **304**. A similar flap (not shown) can also be connected to at least one of second part **202** and base **204**. Optionally, flap **120** can have a textured surface (not shown) configured to help support seatbelt buckle **304**. The textured surface can include at least one protrusion (not shown) substantially perpendicular to a plane of flap **120**. The at least one protrusion can be configured to contact a seatbelt webbing (not shown) on one side. The similar flap (not shown) can have a textured surface (not shown) that can include at least one protrusion (not shown)

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substantially perpendicular to a plane of the similar flap and configured to contact the seatbelt webbing on the other side. In this manner, the at least one protrusion of flap **120** and the similar flap can be configured to hold the seatbelt webbing.

First and second parts **100** and **200** can further comprise at least one pin and at least one socket. In FIG. 1, for example, a pin **122** and a socket **124** can be connected to base **106**. Likewise, in FIG. 2, for example, a pin **220** and a socket **222** can be connected to base **204**. Pin **122** can be configured to engage with socket **222** when first part **100** is connected to second part **200**. Likewise, pin **220** can be configured to engage with socket **124** when first part **100** is connected to second part **200**. Advantageously, pin **122** and socket **222** can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder **300**. Likewise, advantageously, pin **220** and socket **124** can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder **300**.

FIG. 4 illustrates a three dimensional view of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment. In FIG. 4, a seatbelt buckle position holder **400** includes first part **100**, second part **200**, and a divider **402**. Divider **402** is configured to be connected to first and second parts **100** and **200** to form seatbelt buckle position holder **400**. Divider **402** includes a common part **404** of a first collar **406** and a second collar **408**.

In seatbelt buckle position holder **400**, first part **102** and common part **404** can be shaped to form an aperture **410** surrounded by first collar **406**. Aperture **410** can be sized to allow a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through. First collar **406** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304**. For example, if an automobile seat bottom (not shown) lies substantially parallel to the x-y plane, then first collar **406** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304** in a position other than against the automobile seat bottom. In FIG. 4, for example, first collar **406** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304** in a position substantially perpendicular to an automobile seat bottom. First collar **406** can also be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304** in other positions with respect to an automobile seat bottom.

In seatbelt buckle position holder **400**, second part **202** and common part **404** can be shaped to form an aperture **412** surrounded by second collar **408**. Aperture **412** can be sized to allow a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through. Second collar **408** can be configured to support a seatbelt buckle **414**. For example, if an automobile seat bottom (not shown) lies substantially parallel to the x-y plane, then second collar **408** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **414** in a position other than against the automobile seat bottom. In FIG. 4, for example, second collar **408** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **414** in a position substantially perpendicular to an automobile seat bottom. Second collar **408** can also be configured to support seatbelt buckle **414** in other positions with respect to an automobile seat bottom.

In this manner, seatbelt buckle position holder **400** is configured to support adjacent seatbelt buckles **304** and **414**.

Divider **402** can further comprise at least one part of at least one first fastener and at least one part of at least one second fastener. The at least one part of the at least one first fastener and the at least one part of the at least one second fastener can be connected to common part **404**. In FIG. 4, for example, a part **416** of a first fastener **418**, a part **420** of a second fastener **422**, a part **424** of a third fastener **426**, and a part **428** of a fourth fastener **430** can be connected to common part **404**.

At least one of first fastener **418**, second fastener **422**, third fastener **426**, and fourth fastener **430** can be any means that connect first part **100**, second part **200**, and divider **402** including, by way of example only, and not limitation, adhesive means, a band, a strap, a staple, a screw, a pin, a nail, a

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peg, a grommet, a clip, a rivet, a clutch, a snap fastener, a buckle, a button, a frog, a lace, a tie, a zipper, a hinge, a clamshell, a retainer ring, a hook-and-eye closure, a hook-and-loop fastener (e.g., Velcro®), and the like. Advantageously, having all of first fastener **418**, second fastener **422**, third fastener **426**, and fourth fastener **430** can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder **400**.

For example, part **416** can be a female part **432**, part **420** can be a male part **434**, part **424** can be a male part **436**, and part **428** can be a female part **438**. Female part **432** can be configured to be connected to male part **434**, male part **434** can be configured to be connected to female part **438**, male part **436** can be configured to be connected to female part **438**, and female part **438** can be configured to be connected to male part **434**. Male part **434** can be configured in a similar manner as male part **436**. Male part **436** can be configured in a similar manner as male part **438**. (In another embodiment, both parts **416** and **420** can be female parts and both second parts **424** and **428** can be male parts, or vice versa.)

First part **108** can be adjustably connected to part **416** to allow various degrees of separation between first part **102** and common part **404** when first part **100** is connected to divider **402**. Likewise, part **420** can be adjustably connected to first part **112** to allow various degrees of separation between first part **102** and common part **404** when first part **100** is connected to divider **402**. Likewise, second part **208** can be adjustably connected to part **428** to allow various degrees of separation between second part **202** and common part **404** when second part **200** is connected to divider **402**. Likewise, part **424** can be adjustably connected to second part **206** to allow various degrees of separation between second part **202** and common part **404** when second part **200** is connected to divider **402**. In this manner seatbelt buckle position holder **400** can be adjusted to accommodate different sizes of seatbelt buckles **304** and **414**, particularly different thicknesses of seatbelt buckles **304** and **414**.

Divider **402** can further comprise at least one pin and at least one socket. In FIG. **4**, for example, a pin **440**, a socket **442** (not shown), a pin **444**, and a socket **446** can be connected to common part **404**. Pin **440** can be configured to engage with socket **442** and pin **444** can be configured to engage with socket **446** when first part **100** is connected to common part **404**. Likewise, pin **444** can be configured to engage with socket **442** and pin **220** can be configured to engage with socket **446** when second part **200** is connected to common part **404**. Advantageously, pin **440** and socket **442** can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder **400**. Likewise, advantageously, pin **122** and socket **442** can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder **400**. Likewise, advantageously, pin **444** and socket **222** can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder **400**. Likewise, advantageously, pin **220** and socket **446** can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder **400**.

FIGS. **5** through **8** illustrate top views of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to embodiments.

FIG. **5** illustrates a three dimensional view of a first part of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment. In FIG. **5**, a first part **500** includes a first part **502** of a first collar **504**. First part **500** can further comprise a first part **506** of a second collar **508**.

FIG. **6** illustrates a three dimensional view of a second part of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment. In FIG. **6**, a second part **600** includes a second part **602** of first collar **504**. Second part **600** can further comprise a second part **604** of second collar **508**.

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FIG. **7** illustrates a three dimensional view of a partially assembled seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment. FIG. **8** illustrates a three dimensional view of a fully assembled seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment. In FIGS. **7** and **8**, a seatbelt buckle position holder **700** includes first part **500** and second part **600**. First part **500** is configured to be connected to second part **600** to form seatbelt buckle position holder **700**, which includes first collar **504**. Seatbelt buckle position holder **700** can further include second collar **508**.

In seatbelt buckle position holder **700**, first and second parts **502** and **602** can be shaped to form an aperture **702** surrounded by collar **504**. Aperture **702** can be sized to allow a seatbelt Webbing (not shown) to pass through. Collar **504** can be configured to support, for example, seatbelt buckle **414**. For example, if an automobile seat bottom (not shown) lies substantially parallel to the x-y plane, then collar **504** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **414** in a position other than against the automobile seat bottom. In FIG. **8**, for example, collar **504** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **414** in a position substantially perpendicular to an automobile seat bottom (not shown). Collar **504** can also be configured to support seatbelt buckle **414** in other positions with respect to an automobile seat bottom.

Likewise, in seatbelt buckle position holder **700**, first and second parts **506** and **604** can be shaped to form an aperture **704** surrounded by collar **508**. Aperture **704** can be sized to allow a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through. Collar **508** can be configured to support, for example, seatbelt buckle **304**. For example, if an automobile seat bottom (not shown) lies substantially parallel to the x-y plane, then collar **508** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304** in a position other than against the automobile seat bottom. In FIG. **8**, for example, collar **508** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304** in a position substantially perpendicular to an automobile seat bottom (not shown). Collar **508** can also be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304** in other positions with respect to an automobile seat bottom.

At least one of first and second parts **502** and **602** can be shaped to allow access to a release button (not shown) on seatbelt buckle **414**. For example, in FIG. **3**, sometimes seatbelt buckle **414** can have a release button on a face that is substantially parallel to the x-z plane. For example, first part **502** can have a cutaway portion (not shown) similar to cutaway portion **306** on first part **102**. For example, second part **602** can have a cutaway portion (not shown) similar to cutaway portion **308** on second part **202**. At least one of these cutaway portions can allow a user to have access to a release button on seatbelt buckle **414**, for example, when seatbelt buckle **414** is being supported by seatbelt buckle position holder **700**.

Likewise, at least one of first and second parts **506** and **604** can be shaped to allow access to a release button (not shown) on seatbelt buckle **304**. For example, in FIG. **3**, sometimes seatbelt buckle **304** can have a release button on a face that is substantially parallel to the x-z plane. For example, first part **506** can have a cutaway portion (not shown) similar to cutaway portion **306** on first part **102**. For example, second part **604** can have a cutaway portion (not shown) similar to cutaway portion **308** on second part **202**. At least one of these cutaway portions can allow a user to have access to a release button on seatbelt buckle **304**, for example, when seatbelt buckle **304** is being supported by seatbelt buckle position holder **700**.

At least one of first and second parts **500** and **600** can further comprise a base. In FIG. **5**, for example, a base **510** can be connected to first part **502**. Base **510** can have a substan-

tially planar shape. Likewise, in FIG. 6, for example, a base 606 can be connected to second part 602. Base 606 can have a substantially planar shape. Advantageously, at least one of bases 510 and 606 can be positioned to cover one or more pockets (not shown) formed in an automobile seat bottom (not shown). This can prevent seatbelt buckle 304, seatbelt buckle 414, or both from occupying the one or more pockets.

At least one of bases 510 and 606 can be configured to be placed in a gap formed where an automobile seat bottom (not shown) encounters an automobile seat back (not shown). For example, in FIG. 3, if an automobile seat bottom lies substantially parallel to the x-y plane and an automobile seat back lies substantially perpendicular to the x-y plane and substantially parallel to the x-axis, then a gap may exist along a line substantially parallel to the x-axis. Base 510, base 606, or both can be placed in the gap.

At least one of bases 510 and 606 can be shaped to avoid an obstruction present in at least one of an automobile seat bottom, an automobile seat back, and the gap. Sometimes, for example, the seatbelt presents such an obstruction. For example, in FIG. 5, base 510 has a cutaway portion 512. For example, in FIG. 6, base 606 has a cutaway portion 608. Having each of cutaway portions 512 and 608 positioned near the middle of bases 510 and 606 produces salient portions near the edges of bases 510 and 606. At least one of cutaway portions 512 and 608 can allow seatbelt buckle position holder 700 to be positioned near the obstruction and still can allow salient portions of at least one of bases 512 and 608 to be placed in the gap. Advantageously, because seatbelt buckle position holder 700 comprises first and second parts 500 and 600, base 510 of first part 500, for example, can be placed in the gap near the obstruction so that at least one of seatbelt buckles 414 and 304 can be positioned between first and second parts 500 and 600 before first and second parts 500 and 600 are connected.

First and second parts 500 and 600 can further comprise at least one first part of at least one fastener and at least one second part of the at least one fastener. The first part of the at least one fastener can be connected to at least one of first part 502, first part 506, and base 510. The second part of the at least one fastener can be connected to at least one of second part 602, second part 604 and base 606. In FIG. 5, for example, a first part 514 of a first fastener 516 and a first part 518 of a second fastener 520 can be connected to base 510. Likewise, in FIG. 6, for example, a second part 608 of first fastener 516 and a second part 610 of second fastener 520 can be connected to base 606.

At least one of first and second fasteners 516 and 520 can be any means that connect first and second parts 500 and 600 including, by way of example only, and not limitation, adhesive means, a band, a strap, a staple, a screw, a pin, a nail, a peg, a grommet, a clip, a rivet, a clutch, a snap fastener, a buckle, a button, a frog, a lace, a tie, a zipper, a hinge, a clamshell, a retainer ring, a hook-and-eye closure, a hook-and-loop fastener (e.g., Velcro®), and the like. Advantageously, having both first and second fasteners 516 and 520 can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder 700.

For example, first part 514 can be a female part 522, first part 518 can be a female part 524, second part 608 can be a male part 612, and second part 610 can be a male part 614. Male part 612 can be configured to connect to female part 522 and male part 614 can be configured to connect to female part 524. (In another embodiment, first part 514 can be a female part, first part 518 can be a male part, second part 608 can be a male part, and second part 610 can be a female part, or vice versa.)

Male part 612 can have a portion 616 substantially elongated along an axis. Likewise, male part 614 can have a portion 618 substantially elongated along the axis. In FIG. 6, for example, portions 616 and 618 are substantially elongated along a line substantially parallel to the y-axis. Portion 616 can have a protrusion 620 substantially perpendicular to the axis. Likewise, portion 618 can have a protrusion 622 substantially perpendicular to the axis. In FIG. 6, for example, protrusion 620 protrudes from portion 616 substantially along a line substantially parallel to the x-axis, which is perpendicular to the y-axis. Likewise, in FIG. 6, for example, protrusion 622 protrudes from portion 618 substantially along a line substantially parallel to the x-axis, which is perpendicular to the y-axis.

Protrusion 620 can have an original shape and can be made of an elastic material that is configured to compress when protrusion 620 is passed through female part 522 and to expand to the original shape after protrusion 620 has passed through female part 522. Base 510 can include a hole 526 so that protrusion 620 can expand to the original shape after protrusion 620 has passed through female part 522. FIG. 8, for example, illustrates protrusion 620 having expanded to the original shape in hole 526 after protrusion 620 has passed through female part 522.

Likewise, protrusion 622 can have an original shape and can be made of an elastic material that is configured to compress when protrusion 622 is passed through female part 524 and to expand to the original shape after protrusion 622 has passed through female part 524. Base 510 can include a hole 528 so that protrusion 622 can expand to the original shape after protrusion 622 has passed through female part 524. FIG. 8, for example, illustrates protrusion 622 having expanded to the original shape in hole 528 after protrusion 622 has passed through female part 524.

If the original shape of protrusion 620 has a cross sectional area in a plane substantially perpendicular to the x-y plane and substantially parallel to the x-axis that is larger than a cross sectional area in a plane of female part 522 substantially perpendicular to the x-y plane and substantially parallel to the x-axis, then having protrusion 620 expand to the original shape after protrusion 620 has passed through female part 522 can connect male part 612 to female part 522 and, in turn, first part 500 to second part 600 to form seatbelt buckle position holder 700. Male part 614 can be configured in a similar manner as male part 612 so that male part 614 can be made to connect to female part 524.

Male part 612 can be releasable from female part 522. For example, having protrusion 620 compress when protrusion 620 is passed through female part 522 in the reverse direction can allow male part 612 to be separated from female part 522. Likewise, male part 614 can be releasable from female part 524. In this manner, first part 500 can be separated from second part 600.

At least one of the pair of first and second parts 502 and 602 and the pair of first and second parts 506 and 604 can be positioned on bases 510 and 606 to form a flange. In FIG. 8, for example, a flange 802 can be formed by a position of first and second parts 502 and 602 on bases 510 and 606. Likewise, in FIG. 8, for example, a flange 804 can be formed by a position of first and second parts 506 and 604 on bases 510 and 606. Flange 802 can reduce the size of aperture 702 to allow a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through, but to prevent seatbelt buckle 414, for example, from passing through. Flange 802 can be configured to support seatbelt buckle 414. Likewise, flange 804 can reduce the size of aperture 704 to allow a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass

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through, but to prevent seatbelt buckle **304**, for example, from passing through. Flange **804** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304**.

FIGS. **9** through **11** illustrate three dimensional views of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to embodiments. FIG. **12** illustrates a top view of a seatbelt buckle position holder, according to an embodiment.

FIG. **9** illustrates a first three dimensional view of a seatbelt buckle position holder configured to receive or to release a seatbelt buckle, according to an embodiment. FIG. **10** illustrates a second three dimensional view of a seatbelt buckle position holder configured to receive or to release a seatbelt buckle, according to an embodiment. In FIGS. **9** and **10**, a seatbelt buckle position holder **900** includes a collar **902**, a base **904**, and a first hinge **906**. Collar **902** is formed as a first enclosure **908** surrounding an aperture **910**. Base **904** is formed as a second enclosure **912** surrounding aperture **910**. First hinge **906** has a first wing **914** connected to collar **902** and a second wing **916** connected to base **904**.

Collar **902** can be configured to support, for example, seatbelt buckle **304**. For example, if an automobile seat bottom (not shown) lies substantially parallel to the x-y plane, then collar **902** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304** in a position other than against the automobile seat bottom. In FIGS. **9** and **10**, for example, collar **902** can be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304** in a position substantially perpendicular to an automobile seat bottom (not shown). Collar **902** can also be configured to support seatbelt buckle **304** in other positions with respect to an automobile seat bottom.

Seatbelt buckle position holder **900** can further comprise a second hinge **1002**. Second hinge **1002** can have a first wing **1004** connected to collar **902** and a second wing **1006** connected to base **904**. Seatbelt buckle position holder **900** can further comprise a third hinge **918** and a fourth hinge **1008**. Third hinge **918** can have a first wing **920** connected to collar **902** and a second wing **922** connected to base **904**. Fourth hinge **1008** can have a first wing **1010** connected to collar **902** and a second wing **1012** connected to base **904**.

FIG. **11** illustrates a three dimensional view of a seatbelt buckle position holder configured to support a seatbelt buckle, according to an embodiment. FIG. **12** illustrates a top view of a seatbelt buckle position holder configured to support a seatbelt buckle, according to an embodiment.

Seatbelt buckle position holder **900** is configured to receive or to release, for example, seatbelt buckle **304** when the wings of all the hinges are positioned along or external to a circumference defined by first enclosure **908**. For example, in FIGS. **9** and **10**, first and second wings **914** and **916**, first and second wings **1004** and **1006**, first and second wings **920** and **922**, and first and second wings **1010** and **1012** are positioned along or external to the circumference defined by first enclosure **908**. When seatbelt buckle position holder **900** is configured to receive or to release, for example, seatbelt buckle **304**, aperture **910** can be sized to allow, for example, seatbelt buckle **304** and a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through.

Seatbelt buckle position holder **900** is configured to support, for example, seatbelt buckle **304** when the wings of all the hinges are positioned internal to the circumference defined by first enclosure **908**. For example, in FIGS. **9** and **10**, first and second wings **914** and **916**, first and second wings **1004** and **1006**, first and second wings **920** and **922**, and first and second wings **1010** and **1012** are positioned internal to the circumference defined by first enclosure **908**. When seatbelt buckle position holder **900** is configured to support, for example, seatbelt buckle **304**, aperture **910** can be sized to

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allow a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through, but to prevent, for example, seatbelt buckle **304** from passing through. First wing **914**, first wing **1004**, first wing **920**, and first wing **1010** can form a flange **1202**. Flange **1202** can be configured to support, for example, seatbelt buckle **304**.

In a plane substantially parallel to the x-y plane, collar **902** can have any shape such that aperture **910** is sized to allow, for example, seatbelt buckle **304** and a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through. For example, in a plane substantially parallel to the x-y plane, collar **902** can have, by way of example only, and not limitation, one of a square shape, a rectangular shape, a circular shape, and an elliptical shape.

In planes substantially perpendicular to the x-y plane, collar **902** can be shaped to allow access to a release button (not shown) on seatbelt buckle **304**. For example, in FIG. **3**, sometimes seatbelt buckle **304** can have a release button on a face that is substantially parallel to the x-z plane. For example, collar **902** can have a cutaway portion (not shown) similar to cutaway portion **306** on first part **102**. This cutaway portion can allow a user to have access to a release button on seatbelt buckle **304**, for example, when seatbelt buckle **304** is being supported by seatbelt buckle position holder **900**.

Base **904** can be configured to be placed in a gap formed where an automobile seat bottom (not shown) encounters an automobile seat back (not shown). For example, in FIG. **3**, if an automobile seat bottom lies substantially parallel to the x-y plane and an automobile seat back lies substantially perpendicular to the x-y plane and substantially parallel to the x-axis, then a gap may exist along a line substantially parallel to the x-axis.

Base **904** can be shaped to avoid an obstruction present in at least one of an automobile seat bottom, an automobile seat back, and the gap. Sometimes, for example, the seatbelt presents such an obstruction. For example, base **904** can have at least one cutaway portion (not shown) similar to cutaway portion **310** on first part **102**. Having the at least one cutaway portion positioned near the middle of a side of base **904** produces salient portions near the edges of the side of base **904**. The at least one cutaway portion can allow seatbelt buckle position holder **900** to be positioned near the obstruction and still can allow salient portions of the side of base **904** to be placed in the gap.

Seatbelt buckle position holder **900** can further comprise at least one first part of at least one fastener and at least one second part of the at least one fastener. The at least one first part of the at least one fastener can be connected to collar **902**. The at least one second part of the at least one fastener can be connected to base **904**. In FIGS. **9** and **10**, for example, a first part **924** of a first fastener **926**, a first part **1014** of a second fastener **1016**, a first part **930** of a third fastener **932**, and a first part **1020** of a fourth fastener **1022** can be connected to collar **902**. In FIGS. **9** and **10**, for example, a second part **928** of first fastener **926**, a second part **1018** of second fastener **1016**, a second part **934** of third fastener **932**, and a second part **1024** of fourth fastener **1022** can be connected to base **904**.

At least one of first fastener **926**, second fastener **1016**, third fastener **932**, and fourth fastener **1022** can be any means that connect collar **902** and base **904** including, by way of example only, and not limitation, adhesive means, a band, a strap, a staple, a screw, a pin, a nail, a peg, a grommet, a clip, a rivet, a clutch, a snap fastener, a buckle, a button, a frog, a lace, a tie, a zipper, a hinge, a clamshell, a retainer ring, a hook-and-eye closure, a hook-and-loop fastener (e.g., Velcro®), and the like. Advantageously, having all of first fastener **926**, second fastener **1016**, third fastener **932**, and fourth fastener **1022** can contribute to the robustness of seatbelt buckle position holder **900**.

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For example, first part **924** can be a male part **936**, first part **1014** can be a male part **1026**, first part **903** can be a male part **940**, and first part **1020** can be a male part **1030**. For example, second part **928** can be a female part **938**, second part **1018** can be a female part **1028**, second part **934** can be a female part **942**, and second part **1024** can be a female part **1032**. Male part **936** can be configured to connect to female part **938**, male part **1026** can be configured to connect to female part **1028**, male part **940** can be configured to connect to female part **942**, and male part **1030** can be configured to connect to female part **1032**. In this manner, first and second wings **914** and **916**, first and second wings **1004** and **1006**, first and second wings **920** and **922**, and first and second wings **1010** and **1012** can be positioned internal to the circumference defined by first enclosure **908** so that first wing **914**, first wing **1004**, first wing **920**, and first wing **1010** can form flange **1202** so that aperture **910** can be sized to allow a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through, but to prevent, for example, seatbelt buckle **304** from passing through.

Male part **936** can have a portion **944** substantially elongated along an axis. Male part **1026** can have a portion **1034** substantially elongated along an axis. Male part **940** can have a portion **946** substantially elongated along an axis. Male part **1030** can have a portion **1036** substantially elongated along an axis. In FIGS. 9 and 10, for example, portions **944**, **1034**, **946**, and **1036** are substantially elongated along a line substantially parallel to the z-axis.

Portion **944** can have a protrusion **948** substantially perpendicular to the axis. Portion **1034** can have a protrusion **1038** substantially perpendicular to the axis. Portion **946** can have a protrusion **950** substantially perpendicular to the axis. Portion **1036** can have a protrusion **1040** substantially perpendicular to the axis. In FIGS. 9 and 10, for example, protrusion **948** protrudes from portion **944** substantially along a line parallel to the y-axis, which is perpendicular to the z-axis; protrusion **1038** protrudes from portion **1034** substantially along a line parallel to the y-axis, which is perpendicular to the z-axis; protrusion **950** protrudes from portion **946** substantially along a line parallel to the x-axis, which is perpendicular to the z-axis; and protrusion **1040** protrudes from portion **1036** substantially along a line parallel to the x-axis, which is perpendicular to the z-axis.

Portion **944** can be made of an elastic material that is configured to bend to allow protrusion **948** to connect to female part **938**. FIG. 11, for example, illustrates protrusion **948** connected to female part **938**. Portion **1034** can be made of an elastic material that is configured to bend to allow protrusion **1038** to connect to female part **1028**. Portion **946** can be made of an elastic material that is configured to bend to allow protrusion **950** to connect to female part **942**. Portion **1036** can be made of an elastic material that is configured to bend to allow protrusion **1040** to connect to female part **1032**. FIG. 11, for example, illustrates protrusion **1040** connected to female part **1032**.

Male part **936** can be releasable from female part **938**, male part **1026** can be releasable from female part **1028**, male part **940** can be releasable from female part **942**, and male part **1030** can be releasable from female part **1032**. In this manner, first and second wings **914** and **916**, first and second wings **1004** and **1006**, first and second wings **920** and **922**, and first and second wings **1010** and **1012** can be positioned along or external to the circumference defined by first enclosure **908** so that aperture **910** can be sized to allow, for example, seatbelt buckle **304** and a seatbelt webbing (not shown) to pass through.

The embodiments of the seatbelt buckle position holders described herein can be made from at least one material that

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has the physical properties needed for the functions of the seatbelt buckle position holders. The at least one material can be, by way of example only, and not limitation, at least one of polypropylene, polyethylene, acrylonitrile butadiene styrene, and glass-filled nylon.

The embodiments of the seatbelt buckle position holders described herein can be manufactured by any of a variety of processes that produces seatbelt buckle position holders having the features described herein. By way of example only, and not limitation, the embodiments of the seatbelt buckle position holders described herein can be manufactured by an injection molding process.

While various embodiments are disclosed herein, it should be understood that they have been presented by way of example only, and not limitation. It will be apparent to persons skilled in the relevant art that various changes in form and detail may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the embodiments disclosed herein. Thus, the breadth and scope of the claims should not be limited by any of the exemplary embodiments disclosed herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A first part of a seatbelt buckle position holder to facilitate access to a seatbelt buckle, comprising:

- a first part of a collar;
- a first part of a first fastener connected to the first part of the collar;
- a first part of a base connected to the first part of the collar, having a substantially planar shape to be placed in a gap formed where an automobile seat bottom encounters an automobile seat back; and
- a pin connected to the first part of the base;

wherein the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder is to be connected to a second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder to form the seatbelt buckle position holder, the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder an identical duplicate of the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder and including a second part of the collar, a second part of the first fastener, a second part of the base, and a socket connected to the second part of the base, wherein the pin of the first part of the base is to engage with the socket of the second part of the base.

2. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, wherein the first part of the collar is configured to support a seatbelt buckle in a position other than against an automobile seat bottom.

3. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 2, wherein the position is substantially perpendicular to the automobile seat bottom.

4. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, wherein the first part of the collar is shaped to allow access to a release button on a seatbelt buckle.

5. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, wherein the base is shaped to avoid an obstruction present in at least one of the automobile seat bottom, the automobile seat back, and the gap.

6. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, further comprising: a flap connected to the base to help support a seatbelt buckle.

7. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, further comprising:

- a socket connected to the first part of the base, the socket to be engaged with a pin connected to the second part of the base of the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder.

8. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, wherein the first part of the first fastener is to connect

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to the second part of the first fastener connected to the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder.

9. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 8, wherein the first part of the first fastener is releasable from the second part of the first fastener.

10. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 9, wherein a portion of the first part of the first fastener is made of an elastic material.

11. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 8, wherein the first part of the first fastener is a male part and the second part of the first fastener is a female part.

12. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 8, wherein the first part of the first fastener is a female part and the second part of the first fastener is a male part.

13. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 8, wherein the first part of the first fastener is adjustably connectable to the second part of the first fastener to allow various degrees of separation between the first part of the collar and a second part of the collar of the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder when the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder is connected to the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder in a closed position.

14. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, further comprising:

a part of a second fastener connected to the first part of the collar.

15. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, further comprising:

a flap connected to the first part of the collar to help support a seatbelt buckle.

16. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 15, wherein the flap has a textured surface to help support the seatbelt buckle.

17. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, wherein the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder is made of at least one of polypropylene, polyethylene, acrylonitrile butadiene styrene, and glass-filled nylon.

18. A first part of a seatbelt buckle position holder to facilitate access to a seatbelt buckle, comprising:

a first part of a collar;

a first part of a base connected to the first part of the collar; and

a in connected to the first part of the base,

wherein the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder is to be connected to a second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder to form the seatbelt buckle position holder, the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder an identical duplicate of the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder and including a second part of the collar, a second part of the base, and a socket

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connected to the second part of the base, wherein the in of the first part of the base is to engage with the socket of the second part of the base.

19. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 18, wherein the base has a substantially planar shape to be placed in a gap formed where an automobile seat bottom encounters an automobile seat back.

20. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, wherein the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder is optionally connected to the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder via a divider to be fastened to both the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder and the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder to form two apertures to support two adjacent seatbelt buckles.

21. The first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 1, wherein the base is shaped to form a flange such that a size of an aperture formed when the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder is connected to the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder is reduced at the base.

22. A seatbelt buckle position holder to facilitate access to a seatbelt buckle, comprising:

a first part including

a first part of a collar;

a first part of a base connected to the first part of the collar, having a substantially planar shape to be placed in a gap formed where an automobile seat bottom encounters an automobile seat back; and

a pin connected to the first part of the base; and

a second part that is an identical duplicate of the first part that includes

a second part of the collar;

a second part of the base connected to the second part of the collar; and

a socket connected to the second part of the base,

wherein the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder is connectable to the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder by engaging the pin and socket of the base.

23. The seatbelt buckle position holder of claim 22, wherein:

the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder further includes a first part of a fastener connected to the first part of the collar; and

the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder further includes a second part of the fastener connected to the second part of the collar,

wherein the first part of the seatbelt buckle position holder is further connectable to the second part of the seatbelt buckle position holder by engaging the first part of the fastener with the second part of the fastener.

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